“Burned by the Bern”: Sanders Cancels Meeting With AIDS Advocates

May 9, 2016

Presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders once again indefinitely postponed a May meeting with HIV/AIDS leaders, leaving them feeling “burned by the Bern,” as advocate Michael Rajner put it to MSNBC journalist Joy-Ann Reid in the news segment above.

The same thoughts were expressed in a press release by Housing Works, which advocates for the dual crises of HIV and homelessness.

In mid-March, 70 HIV/AIDS advocates sent a letter to the presidential candidates outlining priorities they’d like to see addressed to end the U.S. and global HIV/AIDS epidemic. The outreach resulted in scheduled meetings. An hour-long session with Hillary Clinton is scheduled for Thursday, May 12 in New York. Sanders’s meeting was originally planned for May 3 in Indianapolis; according to the press release, his campaign has not proposed a new date or city.

“This is incredibly disappointing,” said Housing Works president and CEO Charles King in the press release. “I have been a supporter of Bernie Sanders and was proud to vote for him in the New York primary. It is disheartening to see the ‘revolutionary’ candidate who claims to value grassroots organizing and visionary politics not make time in his schedule to meet with us. He is supposed to be the guy who walks the walk, but all we’ve heard the past six weeks is talk—and fairly tepid, reactive talk at that.”

Rajner said that Sanders’s postponement sends “a chilling message,” especially in light of the fact that Donald Trump’s campaign has said it wants to sit down with the AIDS leaders.

UPDATE 1: The Sanders campaign has updated its HIV/AIDS platform to include “a national goal of ending the HIV epidemic in the U.S. by the year 2025 so that HIV is no longer a public health threat to any community in the U.S. and that people with HIV are able to live long, healthy lives.”

In addition, the statement promises that “Bernie will also appoint people living with HIV, community and public health experts and government officials to the HIV/AIDS Task Force to develop specific recommendations on how to successfully accomplish this goal.”

For more on this issue, read Sanders's full HIV/AIDS platform "Working to Create an AIDS and HIV-Free Generation."

UPDATE 2: Sanders has rescheduled for May 25 in California. To read about the Hillary Clinton meeting with AIDS activists in Brooklyn, click here.

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